Harry Hedin, another 1911 graduate, wrote an historical sketch of the experiment station and traced the development of the school. In discussing the experiment station land near the campus, he wrote, “The land is made up of black clay loam, very hard to work. It is low, making it necessary to install a drainage system before the land could be used. There is on the farm two miles of open ditch and nine miles of tile drainage. By means of this combination the soil has been changed so fair crops can now be grown.” Hedin’s words illustrate the fact that even then the Northwest Experiment Station was involved in improving the agricultural methods in the Valley, paving the way for the rich agricultural future to come.

“I predict a bright future of great usefulness for the school and station.”

Dean Albert F. Woods, Department of Agriculture, University of Minnesota, wrote, “This type of school fills a place in our educational system not possible for any other type of school to effectively occupy. It is a school where agriculture as a business and profession is made the dominant note. It trains for the farm and country home, and the improvement of rural conditions.”

Woods concluded, “I predict a bright future of great usefulness for the school and the station.”

Years of growth (1911-1917)

The Northwest School’s early days could be considered “years of growth.” More staff were added, more buildings were constructed, programs were added, enrollment increased. The first graduating class was in 1909, but by 1911, an alumni association was organized. The object was to “bind more closely the graduates who have been closely associated during the school course . . . and to make known to the public the splendid advantages offered by the Northwest School of Agriculture, especially to the young men and women of Northwestern Minnesota.”

By 1913, there were six school buildings. Stephens Hall and Robertson Hall were dormitories; the Sidney M. Owen building was for farm engineering and dairy classes; the first classroom building, the Home Economics building, was for “domestic science.” There was the James J. Hill Building for classes and the new administration building, named in honor of David L. Kiehle, former State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Regent and University professor. Four buildings were formally dedicated on December 5, 1912—Owen, Kiehle, Robertson and Hill. James J. Hill was present for the dedication and attended a “farm style” dinner afterward.

Hill wrote in the 1913 annual, “Every institution engaged in giving instruction in modern farm methods is not only contributing to the advancement of an industry which must always be the foundation of national prosperity and stability, but it is a guidepost pointing the way to what must and will be, for a majority of the young people of our country, the happiest and, if rightly followed, the most successful occupation.”

At the dedication ceremonies, Hill told Superintendent Selvig, “Come to see me at my office, and I’ll give this school a building or provide a fund for some unmet need.” Selvig thanked him and noted he had a long memory. Said Hill, “That’s all right young man; remember it.” Selvig did, but shortly after their meeting, the railroad magnate died. Wrote the young superintendent, “He left a legacy for Northwestern Minnesota even if fate intervened in regard to that promised building.”

Railroad magnate James J. Hill speaks to a Crookston assembly in 1908.